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Most on Billy Probe Panel Feel Libya Money Was Gift

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A majority of the Senate subcommittee investigating Billy Carter's Libyan activities is convinced that the \$220,000 he received from Libya was a gift, and not a loan as he claims.

They have also concluded, after 10 public and about a half-dozen executive sessions, that top administration officials, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security adviser, Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti and CIA director Stansfield Turner, showed questionable judgment in the roles they played in the Billy Carter affair.

Finally, while deciding that the president's brother had no influence on U.S. foreign policy, they concluded that Billy Carter attempted to use his White House connection and that Brzezinski enhanced his stature with the Libyans by asking him to broker a meeting with the chief Libyan diplomat in Washington.

This is the consensus that emerged from interviews with eight of the nine subcommittee members who have been probing Billy Carter's Libyan ties since early August. The ninth, Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz., could not be reached.

The senators appear to be in general agreement on these key points, without any sign of partisan bickering.

For example, on the key question of whether the money that went to Billy Carter was a gift or a loan — a question on which Billy Carter and the chief Justice Department investigator of his case differed sharply — three Republicans and two Democrats says it was a gift. The remaining two Democrats and one Republican believe it doesn't matter because the terms were so generous that the payment — even if it was a loan — was tantamount to a gift.

The only hints of partisan disagreement are on the importance of the inquiry and on how long it should continue.

Most of the Democrats believe the probe has run its course. "We've been stretching to find issues," says subcommittee Chairman Birch Bayh, D-Ind.

But several of the Republicans interviewed say many questions remain unanswered and that the panel will be hard-pressed to complete a final report for the full Senate by the Oct. 4 deadline.

"There's a good many things that need to be tied down and explored," Vice Chairman Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., said. The sentiment was echoed by Sen. Robert Dole, R-Kan.

"We're still learning, that's the problem," said Dole. "We've finished the first round of public hearings and we're just now getting important information—like telephone logs."

He was referring to subpoenaed telephone records which, when recently compiled, revealed a flurry of phone calls by Billy Carter to the Libyan Embassy and to the Charter Oil Co. — for which he was trying to negotiate increased oil allocations from Libya for handsome profits — after Carter arranged a meeting between Brzezinski and a Libyan envoy, Ali Houderi.

There were similar flurries of phone calls on several other key days. One was on Dec. 6, after President Carter met with the Libyan diplomat in the Oval Office. Another was on March 31, when the national security adviser alerted Billy Carter that he was aware of his oil deal effort and warned him that it could embarrass the president.

"In my view, the hearing is not ended," Dole concluded. "If we go on, we'll learn a lot more."

There is bipartisan agreement, however, on the basic conclusions reached by members of the investigating panel.

Bayh said that both Billy Carter and his confidant and business associate, Henry (Randy) Coleman, "were trying to make a fast buck, and to suggest they didn't try to use influence they had is not borne out by the record."

"I see no evidence the money (paid to Carter by the Libyans) was a loan," said Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind.

"I think it (the \$220,000) was a payment to Billy," Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., agreed. But, he added, "I don't think it matters anymore because it's been exposed. By and large, the air's been cleared of this matter."

The eight panel members were unanimous in their belief that top Carter administration officials had exercised bad judgment in their dealings with Billy Carter. They cited Brzezinski and Civiletti most often.

But CIA Director Turner was also criticized by two of the investigators, Lugar and Sen. Charles Mathias, R-Md.

Brzezinski is singled out for asking Billy Carter, at the suggestion of First Lady Rosalynn Carter, to arrange a White House meeting between him and the Libyan diplomat last Nov. 27 for a discussion on the plight of the American hostages in Iran.

"I don't care how long Brzezinski pontificates about the hostages, that was a bad mistake," says Dole.

"Inadvertently or otherwise, that meeting played into Billy's hands," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

Mathias echoed the sentiment, saying: "I still don't understand why he felt it was useful or desirable for Billy Carter to broker that meeting. It's inexplicable."

Civiletti was faulted by several of the Senate probers for withholding from his own Justice Department investigators information he got from a high-level intelligence report early last April to the effect that Billy Carter was on the verge of receiving money from Libya.

Civiletti, in his testimony before the subcommittee, said he did not want to divulge the intelligence source and that he knew that the Justice investigators would find out the same information from their own sources.

However, it took until June for the chief Billy Carter prober, Joel S. Lisker, head of the foreign agents registration unit, to come up with the information.

Lisker's confrontation with Billy Carter on June 11 led to Carter's acknowledgement of his receipt of money, and subsequently to his registration as a foreign agent for Libya.

In his testimony, Billy Carter claimed that the \$220,000 he took from Libya was part of a half-million dollar loan he was trying to negotiate.

But Carter had told Lisker in June that \$20,000 of it was a repayment of expenses he incurred while hosting a delegation of high-level Libyan officials in Atlanta in early 1979.

The Senate probers are scheduled to re-question Billy Carter on this discrepancy sometime this week.

Turner is cited for bad judgment for going only to Brzezinski with information that Billy Carter was negotiating a lucrative oil deal with the Libyans, and not passing on the news to federal law enforcers.

"If better judgment had been exercised all around, this whole Billy Carter episode might have been avoided," conjectured Mathias.

Two of the senators — Dole and Lugar — were also critical of testimony by White House officials during the open hearings of the probe. They directed most of their criticism at Phillip Wise, President Carter's appointments secretary and Billy Carter's closest White House friend.

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